

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle extending along an axial direction;  
an elongated shaft attached to a distal end of said handle; and  
a sharpened tip on a distal end of said elongated shaft, said sharpened tip including an exposed, tapered, and closed opening that is continuously tapered along a length of the opening from a distal closed edge ~~of the opening~~ to a proximal closed edge ~~of the opening~~ and is configured to trap a suture at a selected point within the opening and to permit the suture to pass lengthwise through the opening.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein a least a portion of the opening is dimensioned to wedge and hold a suture in the selected position

4. (Currently Amended) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle extending along an axial direction;  
an elongated shaft attached to a distal end of said handle; and  
a sharpened tip on a distal end of said elongated shaft, said sharpened tip including an exposed and closed opening that comprises an open central axial region ~~which has said tapered configuration~~ in which the central axial region is narrower than the proximal and distal edge regions along a direction perpendicular to the axial direction to trap a suture at a selected point within the opening and to permit the suture to pass lengthwise through the opening.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said opening comprises an elongated opening.

7. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 6, wherein at least a portion of said elongated opening is curved.

8. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip includes an opening; and a locking mechanism having at least a locked position and an unlocked position, said locking mechanism when in said locked position being configured to trap a suture in said opening.

9. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein the suture comprises a length of material, and wherein said opening is configured to allow the suture to pass lengthwise through said opening.

10. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 9, wherein said opening is further configured to allow the suture to be side-loaded into said opening.

11. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip includes an opening into which a suture can be inserted, and wherein said opening is configured to allow the suture to be side loaded into said opening.

12. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip has a hooked configuration.

13. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein:  
said elongated shaft extends along the axial direction and is centered on the axis on which the handle is centered on; and

said sharpened tip is angularly bent about a tip axis that is non-parallel with the axial direction and is relative to said shaft in a selected direction.

14. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip is configured with at least one spiral loop at the distal end of the shaft.

15. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip is bent so the distal tip generally points towards the proximal end of the shaft.

16. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein:  
said elongated shaft extends along an axial direction; and  
said sharpened tip is curved at least partially about the distal end of the shaft and about the axial direction.

17. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip extends at an angle and to one side of the distal end.

18. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip extends at least partially forward from the distal end with a concave configuration.

19. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip extends substantially straight and forward from said distal end.

20. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip is selectively moveable relative to said shaft.

21. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein said sharpened tip is selectively detachable from said shaft.

22. (Currently Amended) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle extending along an axial direction;  
an elongated shaft attached to a distal end of said handle at a proximal end of said shaft;  
and

a detachable needle at a distal end of said elongated shaft, said needle having a side closed through hole into which a suture is attached, wherein the closed through hole is continuously tapered along a length of the through hole from a distal closed edge to a proximal closed edge.

23. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said distal end has a hooked configuration.

24. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said detachable needle is angularly bent relative to said shaft in a selected direction.

25. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said detachable needle is configured with at least one spiral loop at the distal end of the shaft.

26. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said detachable needle is bent so the distal tip generally points towards the proximal end of the shaft.

27. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said detachable needle is curved at least partially about the distal end of the shaft.

28. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said detachable needle extends at an angle and to one side of the distal end.

29. (Previously Presented) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said detachable needle extends at least partially forward from the distal end with a concave configuration.

30. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said detachable needle extends substantially straight and forward from said distal end.

31. (Original) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said needle and suture are detachably affixed to said suturing device by threading the suture through a portion of said suturing device.

32. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said needle and suture are detachably affixed to said suturing device by threading the suture through at least the distal end and the shaft of said suturing device.

33. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein said needle and suture are side-loaded into said suturing device.

34. (Withdrawn) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle;  
an elongated shaft attached to said handle at a proximal end of said shaft;  
a sharpened tip at a distal end of said elongated shaft; and  
a tissue support device disposed adjacent said sharpened tip, configured to move relative to said sharpened tip to facilitate penetration of said sharpened tip through a tissue.

35. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 34, wherein suture is connected with said sharpened tip and moves with the sharpened tip as the sharpened tip penetrates through the tissue.

36. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 34, wherein a suture is connected with said tissue support device, and is located to be engaged by said sharpened tip as said sharpened tip is withdrawn from the tissue.

37-50. (Cancelled)

51. (Withdrawn) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle;  
an elongated shaft attached to said handle;

a sharpened tip on said elongated shaft,  
said sharpened tip being configured to engage a suture; and  
a locking mechanism having at least a locked position and an unlocked position, said locking mechanism when in said locked position being configured to hold the suture in a selected position.

52. (Withdrawn) A suturing device as defined in claim 51, wherein said locking mechanism has at least one partially closed position for capturing the suture and for controlled adjustment of the suture relative to the sharpened tip.

53. (Canceled)

54. (Canceled)

55. (Currently Amended) A suturing device comprising:  
a handle extending along an axial direction;  
an elongated shaft attached to a distal end of said handle;  
a sharpened tip on a distal end of said elongated shaft, said sharpened tip having a piercing portion configured to pierce tissue during a suturing procedure and having an exposed, tapered, and closed opening, wherein the opening is continuously tapered along a length of the opening from a distal closed edge ~~of the opening~~ to a proximal closed edge ~~of the opening~~; and  
a suture coupled with said sharpened tip, said suture having a suture portion extending outward from said sharpened tip to permit said suture to be grasped and manipulated relative to said sharpened tip, said suture portion disposed to be carried by the sharpened tip through tissue which has been pierced by said piercing portion;  
wherein the opening is configured to permit the suture to pass lengthwise through the opening.

56. (Canceled)

57. (Previously Presented) The suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein the sharpened tip includes at least one flat surface and the opening is positioned within the flat surface.

58. (Previously Presented) The suturing device as defined in claim 1, wherein the elongated shaft is detachable from the handle.

59. (Previously Presented) The suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein the detachable needle includes at least one flat surface and the through opening passes through the flat surface.

60. (Previously Presented) The suturing device as defined in claim 22, wherein the elongated shaft is detachable from the handle.